

# THE FEMININE SOUL: The Heart of Human Development <sup>1</sup>

By  
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*“The future of humanity passes through the woman.”*

These words, borrowed from the wisdom of John Paul II, capture the inestimable value of women in the human community.

As a citizen ennobled with boundless natural gifts willed by nature, it is critical for the woman to realize that her unique physiological and psychological nature empowers her for an awesome destiny. This is the flowering and flourishing of progeny and family which are the building blocks of society. Woman is closer to life and its prolongation. Her life centers on *life* itself.

On a significant note, the Philippine Constitution extols motherhood and values it. *“The State shall protect working women . . . taking into account their maternal functions,”*<sup>3</sup> and explicitly recognizes the woman’s *critical role in nation-building.*<sup>4</sup>

It cannot be otherwise, for two reasons: One, *while it is the man who governs, it is the woman who reigns.* Governance, after all, is related to justice while reigning is related to love. The woman is equipped by nature to be a nurturer of a nation’s ultimate resource—whether these be her spouse, her children, her brothers, sisters or her extended family. Often she is the ‘woman-in-the-home’, the simple and uncelebrated ‘*Nanay*’ or ‘*Ate*’ infused and inspired only with a sincere gift of self, finding her full flourishing in her family, embracing the lives that she nurtures. In the ensuing years, seeing them ripen is her crowning glory. What a noble calling!

In other circumstances, the woman reigns as the ‘Manager’ shepherding an enterprise that is the lifeline of families at work. Or mothering wayward boys and girls she has rescued from the pits, giving them back their dignity. She is also there in ‘everlasting motherhood’ as the teacher who plants the seeds of character in girlhood and boyhood. Years after, she beams proudly each time she witnesses the yearly exodus to the grand tune of “*Pomp and Circumstance*” at Graduation.

By nature she is a nurturer. Nature gave her the gift of deep empathy. Not that she puts aside logic. That tool comes in handy *after* she captures the root of a problem and ‘sees’ it with her heart.

True, the man is more attuned to the practical, the concrete, the monetary, and the material. This is significant, for nothing can so dull the soul as counting, and only what is material can be counted. But the woman counts ideals. That is why man, generally, is *the giver*, while woman is *the gift*. The man *has*, the woman *is*. And she is

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from *IMPACT*, CBCP Communications Foundation, Manila, March 2009.

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<sup>3</sup> Article XIII, Section 14, 1987 Constitution.

<sup>4</sup> Article II, Section 14, *Ibid*.

unhappy unless she makes the double gift: first of herself to man, then of herself to posterity—in the form of children, wards, or workforce—then in the form of their successes.

A certain transcendence is already hers because of her functional difference from man. But it is an attribute that is meant for woman and man to compliment each other. Equal in dignity and value, their complementarity is crucial to authentic human development.

It therefore behooves the human family to celebrate this complementarity and live eternal vigilance for it.

### **Eternal vigilance is the order of the day.**

Vigilance against what? Vigilance against subtle inroads that are underway, designed to undermine the truths about woman. ‘Subtle’ is not even accurate. Rather, the more appropriate way to describe it is *stealth*. How is it being done?

To start with, the noble truth about womanhood is cherished and safeguarded in international documents. The *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*, frequently known as CEDAW, protects motherhood and “the great contribution of women in the welfare of the family and society.”<sup>5</sup> It ensures that family education include “a proper understanding of maternity as a social function.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirms that “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.”<sup>7</sup> The *International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* expresses the need for protection to mothers before and after childbirth.<sup>8</sup> The Programme of Action of the *International Conference on Population and Development*, or ICPD, speaks of improved prenatal care, of normal and safe delivery.<sup>9</sup> The *Beijing Plan of Action* calls attention to “programmes to help the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing role.”<sup>10</sup> It appears good so far.

### **Enter: New ‘rights.’**

Not today. Notably, there is nothing in those international documents that speaks of abortion ‘rights’, an advocacy that creeps into almost every legislative proposal in Congress having to do with women. And it continues to find its way into legislation in many permutations of language: *management of abortion and abortion complications, fertility regulation, safe motherhood, maternal mortality*. Even the right to life is not spared, from which a ‘*woman’s right to abortion*’ is a bizarre distillation.<sup>11</sup>

While the current term and issues of *reproductive and sexual health* were certainly placed on the agendas of those conferences, the radical feminist participants failed at that time in their primary mission of defining abortion-on-demand as a reproductive right. So grand was their failure, in fact, that when several states boycotted or threatened to boycott the Cairo conference altogether, every official of note at the

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW Preamble, 13<sup>th</sup> par.

<sup>6</sup> CEDAW, Art. 5 (b).

<sup>7</sup> UDHR, Par. 25 (2).

<sup>8</sup> ICESCR, Par. 10 (1)

<sup>9</sup> ICPD Pars. 8.22, 13.14.

<sup>10</sup> BEIJING DECLARATION Par. 285a, Fourth World Conference on Women.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Sylva, Ph.D. & Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D., *Rights by Stealth: The Role of UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies in the Campaign for an International Right to Abortion*, The National Catholic Bioethics Center, [www.ncbcenter.org](http://www.ncbcenter.org)

conference was compelled to state on record that the conference did not establish any new rights.<sup>12</sup>

At ICPD in Cairo, the *Holy See* maintained its vehement opposition to abortion, with *Costa Rica, Argentina, Malta, Venezuela, Morocco* and *Ecuador* continuing to insist that they would not agree to any definitions that could be construed as including access to abortion.<sup>13</sup> According to an Asian delegate, it was clear “that given the diametrically opposite views on the subject held by different member states, the Conference would not be in a position to endorse, on a global basis, the concept of legal abortion, even in the case of rape or incest.”<sup>14</sup> There was simply no clarion call for abortion rights emerging from the conferences.

Or so we think.

Today, those international declarations are also the vehicles where radical and wayward liberties ride.

In the paper, *Rights by Stealth: The Role of UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies in the Campaign for an International Right to Abortion*, authors Dr. Sylva and Dr. Yoshihara of the International Organizations Research Group tell of UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies and an interlocking network of UN agencies, UN officials, and NGOs who meet regularly and are working relentlessly to this day, to convince nations that existing human rights can be *re-interpreted* to include reproductive and sexual health rights, including a right to abortion as “necessary components of a host of already existing human rights.” The strategy foisted worldwide, including on Philippine policy-makers, legislators, and NGO’s is for nation-states to accept the notion that these treaties can in fact evolve, and to accept the notion that the U.N. treaty bodies should follow the recommendations of the reproductive rights NGOs and UN agencies.<sup>5</sup><sub>1</sub>

The agenda has its concrete influence and manifestations in the Philippines. An Asian diplomat has served on the CEDAW committee for seventeen years, and between 1997 and 2006 has reportedly led the committee’s pressuring of Australia, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mexico, Nepal, Northern Ireland (UK), Paraguay, Portugal, Togo, and Zimbabwe to liberalize their abortion laws or policies.<sup>16</sup>

The UN Treaty Monitoring Committees work with a network of NGO’s in the different countries. And not only have the committees come to rely on NGO’s for input on state practice, they use them as watchdogs and enforcers of committee recommendations.<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, treaty bodies continue to ask nations for information about abortion laws during their review proceedings. Based on such ‘shadow reports’, the monitoring bodies issue recommendations to governments concerning actions they should take to comply with their ‘treaty obligation’. In the Philippines, one of many such partner NGO’s partners is EnGendeRights that claims to influence outcome documents, including CEDAW’s last review of the Philippines.<sup>8</sup><sub>1</sub>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Notably, the 1987 Constitution was already in force at the time of the Cairo conference in 1994. Nothing is heard of the Philippine delegation.

<sup>14</sup> Jyoti Shankar Singh, *Creating a New Consensus on Population* (London: Earthscan, 1998) 58, cited by Sylva & Yoshihara.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Sylva & Yoshihara, *op cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

In the decade that followed, UN member nations have allowed the strategy to develop to an extensive degree, despite the fact that it undermines their own laws.

In the Philippines today, we are seeing the proposed *Magna Carta of Women*, a contentious bill that was recently refined and 'tamed' by a House and Senate Bicameral Committee last March 3<sup>rd</sup>. It would have been worse, *sans* the strong advocacy of our Catholic Bishops for our Legislators to hew the substitute bill according to constitutional imperatives.

The Bicameral Committee reconsidered and deleted a dangerous *proviso* in Section 2 that would have legalized open defiance of freedom of religious belief and its free exercise by women and men. The primacy and supremacy of the Philippine Constitution, with its strong and express recognition of the right to life, the inherent, fundamental and inalienable rights of spouses, parents, and families, was added in Section 3 for emphasis. *Gender* and its contentious definition was deleted. In Section 17, no. 6, "*management of abortion complications*" was changed to "Prevention of abortion AND MANAGEMENT OF PREGNANCY AND POST-PREGNANCY COMPLICATIONS."

Shorn of its constitutionally unacceptable portions, the Magna Carta speaks nobly of the role of women in nation building and of their substantive equality with men.<sup>19</sup> It seeks to promote the empowerment of women and equal opportunities for both women and men towards equal access to resources and to the outcomes of development.<sup>20</sup>

But the Magna Carta would have been truer to its name and purposes if it had provisions recognizing the non-monetized work of women in the home, the "ordinary housewife" who makes it her life to live for others. It would have been really a celebration of "women in nation building" if there were concrete mechanisms of social support for mothers choosing to be simply "at home". The Magna Carta's silence about these noble women whose numbers cannot be ignored is a sad note to an otherwise landmark document.

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<sup>19</sup> Section 1, Declaration of Policy.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*